Panchsheel. Both sides are making efforts for further improving the bilateral relations including measures to expand bilateral trade and enhance bilateral exchanges in various fields. The two sides are in regular contact through diplomatic and non-official channels and at various other levels. Visits of Parliamentarians, people-to-people exchanges, visits of political party delegations and functional exchanges in diverse fields are also taking place. Bilateral trade is growing, and reached US$ 1.92 billion in 1998, representing an increase of 5% over 1997. There remains considerable potential to expand our economic and commercial co-operation.

The Joint Working Group on the Boundary Question, set up in 1988 during the visit of PM Rajiv Gandhi to China, and the Protocol on Foreign Office Consultation, signe during the 10th Meeting of the Joint Working Group held in New Delhi in August 1997, provide a framework for bilateral dialogue. The two sides are scheduled to hold Foreign Office Consultations on 25-26 February 1999 in Beijing. No dates have yet been finalised for the 11th meeting of the Joint Working Group.

Strengthening of Indo-Pak Relations

367. SHRI AKHILESH DAS:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what confidence building measures have been taken between India and Pakistan since the resumption of Secretary level talks between the two countries indicating also the steps for fostering closer people to people relations; and

(b) what further steps are contemplated in this direction?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) In the lahore Declaration of 21 February 1999, India and Pakistan have agreed to take immediate steps for reducing the risk of accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons, and to take measures for confidence building in the nuclear and conventional field aimed at the prevention of a conflict. The two countries further decided to work towards agreements for advance notification regarding ballistic missile flight tests, and on prevention of incidents at sea in order to ensure safety of navigation by naval vessels and aircraft of the two countries. The two countries also decided to upgrade and make secure and failsafe communication links for example, between the respective Directors General, Military Operations of the two sides, to review implementation of the existing CBMs and to set up a consultative mechanism to monitor and ensure the effective implementation of these CBMs.

During their meeting in Lahore on 20-21 February 1999, the two Prime Ministers decided that consultations will be held between concerned officials to further liberalise the travel and visa regimes between the two countries.

Membership of the UN-Security Council

368. SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:
SHRI AKHILESH DAS:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Russian Prime Minister during his recent New Delhi visit indicated their support for india's claim to Permanent membership of the U.N. Security Council; if so, in what terms; and

(b) what is the latest position about support to India's claim from various developed and developing countries?